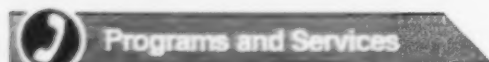




Navigation Path >> Home | Programs and Services

Tuesday, June 26, 2007



Farm and Food Report, Week of January 23, 2006

Southwest Beef Initiative Meetings Draw Strong Support From Producers | New Study On Wheat And Barley Research Confirms Value Of Research | La Reata Ranch: A Little Piece Of Paradise By Lake Diefenbaker | Scientists Look At Greenhouse Gas Emissions In Rangelands | U Of S Launches International Indigenous Agri-Entrepreneurship Program

Week of January 23, 2006

SOUTHWEST BEEF INITIATIVE MEETINGS DRAW STRONG SUPPORT FROM PRODUCERS

There is likely no more satisfying job for someone in the business of agricultural diversification than to travel around southwestern Saskatchewan asking beef producers for their support for a new packing plant.

That is precisely what Karen Bonesky has been doing for the last few months on behalf of the Southwest Beef Initiative.

"Southwest Beef is calling on beef producers and bison producers in the province to commit to the supply of 60,000 head for a new packing plant that will be built near Swift Current," she explains. "We have been targeting farmers and ranchers since mid-November, and their support for this initiative has been overwhelming."

The Southwest Beef Initiative has held more than 20 meetings in November and December around communities like Oyen, Eastend, Shaunavon, Leader, Climax, Gull Lake, Kyle, Consul, Val Marie, Chaplin, Mankota, Maple Creek, Cadillac, Coronach, Mayfair, Unity, Vanscoy, Beechy, Alida, Craik, Birch Hills and Swift Current.

Bonesky has barely had a chance to catch her breath, and she is off again this month to places like Abbey, Mortlach and Warman.

"We are working on our final marketing plan, and central to this is the establishment of a strong supply base—one that can sustain a 200-head per day operation," she says. "This initiative is supported by partners who are cattle producers, feedlot operators and veterinarians. There are also rural municipalities, the City of Swift Current, the credit unions of southwest Saskatchewan, the Southwest Community Futures Development Corporation and the First Nations of Saskatchewan."

"Together they make up Southwest Beef, which will cater to both global and domestic marketplaces. Working with local, regional and global partners, Southwest Beef will create jobs and training opportunities, aligning the components of a regional value chain, which utilizes the existing infrastructure and resources in southwest Saskatchewan."

To find out more, visit: <http://www.greatwestbeef.ca/>.

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Week of January 23, 2006

NEW STUDY ON WHEAT AND BARLEY RESEARCH CONFIRMS VALUE OF RESEARCH

Conventional wisdom on crop development research just got another boost. A new study sponsored by the Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF) confirms that research delivers great value to the industry, especially when it focuses on wheat and barley.

"The study that was conducted gave us the results we expected, as we expected to find a positive rate of return on research investment," says Hartley Furtan, a professor with the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Saskatchewan.

More specifically, the study aimed to determine the return on investment to farmers who support variety development through the Wheat and Barley Check-off Fund, which is administered by the WGRF.

The study found that every dollar invested in wheat development returns a minimum of \$4 to the farmer, and every dollar invested in barley returns a minimum of \$12.

"The barley figure is higher," explains Furtan, "because there is less barley research. These studies are useful for governments and producers, because they get to see what the value is for the money they spend.

"The reality," he goes on, "is that spending on research is a good long-term investment, which is a good rationale for federal and provincial governments to invest more money in crop development research."

Furtan emphasizes that people should know that the study found strong positive returns for barley research and wheat research on the prairies, and that the numbers are pretty much in line with the international numbers that other people report. It supports the view that agriculture research continues to be a good investment.

A private firm, TESCO Consulting LTD. of Regina, conducted the study in conjunction with Furtan and fellow University of Saskatchewan agricultural economists Richard Gray and Alper Guzel.

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[Table of Contents](#)

Week of January 23, 2006

LA REATA RANCH: A LITTLE PIECE OF PARADISE BY LAKE DIEFENBAKER

On the international circuit, the La Reata Ranch is considered one of the crown jewels of the Saskatchewan tourism industry.

Located on the shores of Lake Diefenbaker near Kyle, tucked away in the beautiful Saskatchewan River valley, the operation has been entertaining city folks from across Europe and North America since 1996, thanks to George Gaber and his partners.

"I come from Germany. I came here in 1995 while I was on holidays," says Gaber. "I went up to the Tisdale area to enjoy a ranch vacation and came south, outside of Swift Current, and spent another week there. I liked both places but the south felt more cowboy country.

"We went out and camped out overnight with the horses down by Swift Current Creek and that really got me. I couldn't believe it. It was like we know it on Europe, on TV and in the movies. I felt right in it. I decided 'Wow! That is what I want to do!'"

In the rolling hills of the Coteau region, Gaber found his calling. The landscape is a mixture of rolling prairies, open range, canyons, river hills and the sandy beaches of Lake Diefenbaker.

The large ranch property includes nine miles of river frontage. Nature changes its palette with the seasons, from the purple crocus in spring to the pink flowering cactus in summer, to the splendour of golden colours in the fall.

"I packed up and moved to Canada, to Saskatchewan. The old Shaw place it was. Robert Shaw. It came for sale. Then, we built the guest ranch part down by the coulee that drains into Lake Diefenbaker but used to drain in the South Saskatchewan River. It is just a mile east of the main ranch here.

"I learned lots of stuff. I had the experience from back home. I grew up on a ranch and had my own horses—a farm. We had cattle and pigs. I learned from my parents. We built our own herd of cattle. We took some cows over but we expanded over the years. We have about 100 pairs—a cow-calf operation throughout the summer—mostly black Angus."

Pretty soon, Gaber found himself hitting the travel trade trail. With his native command of German, he was well equipped to attend Equitana, the world's largest horse show in Germany, which takes place every two years. This led to his first bookings.

"We can accommodate up to 20 people. We run about 23 horses. It started out pretty good, and then September 11th knocked everything back and it was kind of bad then. Now it is finally picking up again.

"The main reason our guests come here is the horseback riding—but it is not toy riding. We take them out on a daily basis to check the cattle. We have to move the cattle. We have to rope them and treat them. The big event of the year is the branding over three days. We round them all up, bring them home, sort them out and count them, and do the authentic branding, rope them and drag them to the fire."

The guests can get involved and hold the calves and brand them. "We have our own registered brand. It is an L and a bar for La Reata, on the left rib," Gaber says.

"Most of our guests are from Germany, but also from Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Now we are getting into the Scandinavian market—Denmark, for instance."

When asked how people react to him in his adoptive community—given that George is not your typical cowboy—he comes up with the answer you'd expect from a cowboy: "I never had one complaint yet from anyone. The community here accepts me. They really do. There was a huge welcome. All the neighbours are very good to us. They help me out. They like that kind of business. They socialize with us. They are kind-hearted folks.

"I like the lifestyle, being out here, the wide open space, freedom, having people coming out. You meet people from around the world. You make friends. They invite you. They love you. Most of them arrive in late evening so it is dark. In the morning, they see where they are. For them it is just incredible. They feel like crying, especially when they leave—they don't want to go. They want to move to Canada. They just love it. It makes an incredible impression on them."

George Gaber has no misgivings about his choices.

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[Table of Contents](#)

Week of January 23, 2006

SCIENTISTS LOOK AT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IN RANGELANDS

It seems nothing escapes the scrutiny of scientists when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions.

A team of researchers from the University of Saskatchewan recently completed an investigation of greenhouse gas emissions in Saskatchewan rangelands.

Global climate change has been linked in recent times to increases in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases

(GHG) due to the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and changes in land use. The major GHGs of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane have always been produced naturally in the environment as a result of normal biological processes. But changes to the environment as a result of human activities can shift the balance of natural controls on these processes. It is the disruption of the natural controls on GHG production that has, in many cases, led to an increase in production of these gases.

Estimates are that primary agriculture contributes approximately 10 per cent of Canada's GHG emissions (source: AAFC). Rangelands, like other natural systems, will produce GHGs to some extent. Determining the magnitude of GHG emissions from rangeland will help Canada comply with its emission reduction targets, according to Yuguang Bai, project leader and associate professor with the Department of Plant Science at the University of Saskatchewan.

"GHG emissions from rangelands, especially those with hummocky terrain, are understudied—possibly due to complex interactions of landform elements, physical characteristics, disturbance and plant community, all of which vary in space and time," he explains. "The objectives of this study were to contrast the spatial variability of GHG emissions between protected and defoliated rangelands, to model landscape-level variations in GHG emissions and to correlate GHG [emissions] with landscape elements, biophysical factors, plant species diversity and forage production. In addition, we wanted to determine the relationship between range condition and soil carbon, as well as the effect of shrub invasion on soil carbon. Finally, we hoped to provide baseline data for optimal pasture management to maximize economic and ecological returns."

To achieve this, Bai and his colleagues conducted three experiments in central and southern Saskatchewan between 2003 and 2005. The areas studied covered the mixed grassland and moist mixed grassland ecoregions.

A number of landform elements were looked at for the GHG experiment, such as the north-facing concave aspect, the north facing convex aspect, the south facing concave aspect, level upland and depression, within hummocky landscapes.

"We applied a defoliation treatment in April to simulate grazing, among other things, and we measured carbon dioxide and other gas emissions every seven to 10 days, from spring until fall, with chambers designed specifically for this purpose," says Bai. "We found that particular landscape elements significantly affected the flux of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide. We also found that biophysical characteristics, such as soil temperature and water content, as well as plant species composition, also varied among landscape elements, contributing to variations in GHG fluxes. The greatest GHG flux was found in the depression. Mowing increased the positive flux of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide while increasing the negative flux of methane."

The scientists also selected nine sites on which to study the effect of shrub invasion on soil carbon. Results showed that, along a gradient from grassland to shrub communities, soil organic carbon (SOC) had a less than five per cent increase. Effectively, there was no significant difference in SOC between the different plant communities.

Another nine sites were selected to study the effect of cattle grazing on soil carbon. Investigation revealed that grazing did not significantly affect SOC. The researchers found that soil carbon was controlled more by soil texture than by shrub cover or grazing, with loamy soils having greater SOC and root biomass than sandy soils.

"Overall, the mixed prairie of Saskatchewan likely contributes very little to GHG emissions," concludes Bai. "Properly managed, the mixed grass prairie has a well-balanced nutrient cycle that includes various GHGs. The grassland ecosystem plays a role in mitigating climate change by retaining carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere if poor grazing management or conversion to arable agriculture occurred."

It appears current management practices aiming at sustainability and fostering the integrity of grassland ecosystems should be maintained.

Support for this study was provided by the Agriculture Development Fund of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, the BGSS program of the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council and the University of Saskatchewan. The other investigators were doctors Brian McConkey, Dan Pennock, Jim Romeo and Rich Farrell, former Masters student Matthew Braun and Ph.D. candidate Tyler Colberg.

The final report of this study can be downloaded as a PDF document at:

http://www.agr.gov.sk.ca/apps/adf/adf_admin/reports/20020082.pdf

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[Table of Contents](#)

Week of January 23, 2006

U OF S LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS AGRI-ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

The University of Saskatchewan is proposing a new experiential program in agricultural and bio-resource entrepreneurship for young indigenous people, with an international element.

Tom Allen, the CIBC Scholar, Agricultural Entrepreneurship, at the College of Agriculture is at the centre of the program, which was developed in conjunction with Massey University in New Zealand and the University of Arizona.

"I have met numerous individuals and delegations from First Nations in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and they are frustrated as they go through a claims process without seeing any changes," Allen says. "Claims are settled; funds transferred; and land purchased, but it has not created very much wealth for the community, and it has created very few jobs.

"I have had an opportunity to travel to the U.S., Australia and New Zealand, and to visit indigenous people in these countries, including Canada. There are some great things happening out there. A year ago, we brought some world-recognized experts from the four countries to talk about land as an economic base because, let's face it, unless you have an economic base, how can you have a sustainable culture or be sovereign?"

This is why the Canadian program will consist of an intensive short course in entrepreneurship, followed by educational field trips in New Zealand, the United States and Western Canada. It will introduce the participants to viable agricultural and bio-resource ventures established by indigenous people in the three countries.

The program will encourage participants to explore ways of creating new value-added ventures on indigenous lands. Students will broaden their knowledge of the global agricultural and bio-resource industries and, through participation in this program, will acquire the skills needed to become industry leaders when they return home.

"It is a different way of learning," Allen points out. "You can sit people in classrooms and lecture to them, or you can actually experience the opportunities. We are going to New Zealand because I believe they are the leaders. The Maoris have created business structures that allow them to have economic

development take place. They handle the communal land issue by creating large trusts and corporations to handle their economic development. We can talk about it, but the way to really learn about it is to go and visit.

"Indigenous communities will show us how they do it—how they make it happen. We are going to come back to Canada and, later in the spring, we are going to go to Arizona to meet up with Aboriginal people. We will meet up with people from the University of Arizona, and we are going to come back to Canada to visit some of the progressive Aboriginal communities here."

But when they come back to Canada, they will bring guests with them, notes Allen.

"We will have Americans with us, we will have some Maoris with us from New Zealand, and we will be sitting down at every stop and talking about how this can work. What can we do to make this work? And will it work at home? It is a way to create excitement; it is a way to explore new opportunities, and I am really keen on it."

So far, seven people are on board for this first year.

"We have individuals from three provinces and one territory. It is a three-credit course. Some of the students are current students. We have one who is a tribal chief, we have a Director of Lands from Alberta, we have some graduate students—a real cross-section of men and women. They have to be between 21 and 45 years of age.

"On January 26 and 27, we are meeting at the university for orientation. We leave for New Zealand on February 9, where we will stay for 16 days."

Then it will be Arizona in May, and then the final component will take place back in Canada, explains Allen.

"At that time, for the course, every student has to do a major paper which takes the form of a report to their community about what they have learned in terms of bringing this new-found information home—will it work, will it not. In some cases, it may not. We are going to see a real range of initiatives."

Allen and his international colleagues hope that this experience will lead to new relationships being built and new networks being formed, and that this will lead to new momentum to utilize the land base to improve social and economic conditions for the indigenous landholders.

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